

The Major Henry Lee Headquarters
Wagaraw Road between Bergen and Pamona Avenues
Borough of Fairlawn, Bergen County, New Jersey

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PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA
District of New Jersey

Historic American Buildings Survey
Seymour Williams, F.A.I.A., District Officer
133 Central Avenue, Rahway, New Jersey

The Major Henry Lee Headquarters (Reyerson House)
Wagaraw Road between Bergen and Pamona Avenues
Borough of Fairlawn, Bergen County, New Jersey

Owner: Cornelia M. Mortlock

Date of Erection: About 1750. (Front porch added and
interior woodwork replaced ca. 1830)

Architect: Unknown

Builder: Dirck Reyerson (1722-1766)

Present Condition: As refinished about 1830 and with
modern additions. Occupied as a
two family house

Number of Stories: One and one-half and basement

Materials of Construction: Foundation - local sandstone

Exterior walls - formal coursed
ashlar for front of main unit
only, rubble work for the other
walls, all to eave line, and
with frame gable ends above
that line

Interior walls - lath and
plaster on wood studding

Roof - gambrel on main unit,
gable on minor unit, all
covered by modern asbestos
shingles. Dormer windows
modern. Front veranda about 1830

Historical Data:

Title to the land on which this house was later
erected apparently is traced from 2 November 1706, the
date of a deed conveying to George Ryersen of Pompton,
N. J., and Ryer Ryersen and Francis Ryersen of New York
City, for 145 pounds sterling, some 600 acres on Passaic

River, within the bounds of the modern Boroughs of Hawthorne and Fairlawn, Bergen County. In 1709 the said Francis and George Ryersen with Uriah Westervelt secured from the Indians 1425 acres including nearly all of the western half of what became Manchester Township and about all of the present First Ward of the City of Paterson, and it was confirmed to them by Patent in 1717.^(a) On 7 June 1721 they divided the tract.

This Frans Ryersen was baptized 2 August 1685 in the Reformed Dutch Church of Brooklyn, N. Y., youngest son of Martin Reyersen and his wife Annetje Rapalje, and he died about 1749 and was buried in the family plot at "Wagraw" (now the Borough of Hawthorne) Bergen County, N. J., on what in 1916 was the farm of a descendant, Richard De Gray. Frans Reyersen resided in New York City and in Brooklyn for sometime after his brothers Joris (George) and Ryer had removed to New Jersey. About 1708 he joined them in Bergen County, settling at the Wagraw, north of the present city of Paterson, in that part of Bergen County which was set off in 1837 as Passaic County. He had married in 1706 or 1707 Jannetje, born 24 November 1685 in New York City, daughter of Theunis Dircksen and wife Hannah (Schouten) Dey, and of twelve children had a sixth son, Dirck.

Dirck Reyersen, last named, baptized 10 October 1722, died at Wagraw between 6 November 1766 and 23 January 1767, the dates of signing and of probate of his will, and was buried in the family plot above mentioned, his gravestone being readable in 1882 as 1766 D. R.^(b) He had married his cousin Lena Ryersen, baptized 25 November 1730, daughter of Johannis G. Ryersen and his second wife Geertje Hesselse, and had issue (1) Jannetje baptized 10 June 1759 at Paramus, Bergen County, who married Johannes Berdan, (2) John Dirck, of whom

(a) Clayton and Nelson, History of Bergen and Passaic Counties, publ. Phila. 1882, p. 559

(b) Ibid, p. 562

* See his house at 367 Goffle Road, in the adjacent Boro. of Hawthorne, Passaic Co., surveyed as H.A.B.S. NJ-165.

further, (3) Geertje baptized 16 April 1763, who married Abraham D. Banta, and (4) Francis Dirck, baptized 12 September 1764, who died 27 March 1817.(c)

The will of this Dirck Reyerson of Wagraw, Bergen County, abovenamed dated 6 Nov. 1766 and proved 23 January 1767, devised to wife Lena all real and personal property during her widowhood, excepting a lot in New York City; to his eldest son John 20 shillings and the west half of the homestead lot and lot No. 22 in New York City; to son Francis the east half of the homestead lot and half the lot in the city, both sons being described as under age 21, and legacies of 80 pounds each to daughters Jean and Geertje Reyerson.(d)

John Dirck Ryerson, eldest son and devisee abovenamed, was baptized 21 February 1761 in the Reformed Dutch Church at Paramus, Bergen County, and having inherited half the paternal homestead in Wagraw, died in Saddle River Township, Bergen County, in the house (here surveyed) fronting the Wagaraw Road and the north bank of the Passaic River in the modern Borough of Fairlawn. By his will dated 11 February 1835 and proved 11 December postea, devised to his daughter Ellen his homestead, describing it as "Beginning at an apple tree on the south side of the bridge near the mill", bounded south by Passaic River, east by a mill pond and bass brook, north by the land of the widow Gotchius, and west by that of John G. Ryerson, Jacob and Henry Gotchius, and nominated her with Aaron Doughty and grandson John Berdan as executors.

(c) Albert W. Ryerson, The Ryerson Genealogy, Chicago, 1916, pp. 10, 30, 69.

(d) N. J. Archives, Vol. 33, p. 350, Abstracts of Wills

The daughter and devisee, Ellen Ryerson Doty,* of the same Township, by her will of 19 January 1837, proved 21 March 1839, devised the same unto her husband Aaron Doughty, who, with his second wife Tressa, conveyed the same property as 96.44 acres to Albert P. Alyea by deed of 15 October 1842, describing it as "the old homestead farm of John D. Ryerson, deceased". By a deed of 21 January 1860, Sophia Alyea, widow (who had been appointed administratrix of the estate of her husband Albert P. Alyea, deceased, on 12 September 1848) released her dower rights in this property to Peter R. Outwater. By deed of the same date, the other heirs of Alyea conveyed to Outwater for \$4266.64 some 76 acres of the farm, and he devised to his wife Eliza during her widowhood, and thereafter to his sons Albert and Richard the homestead farm by his will of 19 March 1867, proved 6 December 1871. The latter named of the two sons sold to the other Albert A. Outwater, by deed of 8 April 1882, his 39 acre westerly half of the farm, and by deed of 7 July 1906 Eliza Outwater, the widow, released her dower rights in the same to him. A. A. Outwater died 26 February 1909, having by will devised his estate to his wife Sarah during her widowhood, and thereafter to his other heirs. The latter, by their deed of 18 April 1925, conveyed this property to Modestino Manfra and wife, but after foreclosure proceedings, the sheriff seized the same and conveyed it to Cornelia M. Mortlock by deed of 2 March 1933, and she remains in possession at the time of our survey of the house 1939. In that instrument the property is described as being in the Borough of Fairlawn and having a 292 foot frontage on the north side of Wagraw Road containing 2.13 acres.

*Ellen Ryerson b. 17 Mar. 1793, dau. of John D. Ryerson and wife Nancy Archibald, d. 17 Mar. 1839, having mar. 1: David Berdan and 2: Aaron Doty. See (c)

This house claims historical fame as having been occupied as headquarters in the Fall of 1780 by Major Henry Lee when ordered by General Washington to guard the approach to the encampment of General Lafayette* on the Goffle, in Saddle River Township, (e) and in 1930 a marker of that event was erected at the house by the Garret A. Hobart Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution.

Architectural Analysis:

Difficulty in determining which unit of this once notable and typically Dutch two-part house is made by certain contradictory evidence in the structure itself. Ordinarily, the larger unit was a later addition to the smaller and original cottage when the ability of the owner and the increase in his family allowed and required more accommodation. That such was the case here would be indicated by the two small windows in the east end wall of the garret of the main house being so placed to allow for the ridge of the roof of the minor wing already abutting there. But the clapboard siding of that gable end is visible from the garret of the minor wing, a fact which indicates, per contra, that the wing was erected subsequently against the main house. The most unusual feature in this connection is the wood beam carrying masonry over a span of six feet eight inches in the south front of this minor wing where it abuts the east gable end of the main house. It is possible to deduce that this was the distance between the main house and what was an entirely separate kitchen, that the west wall of the latter was later demolished and that building extended to the wall of the main house. Notice also the stone sill of the passage door between the two units, a fact which indicates it having previously been an exterior doorway. Permission to raise floor boards in order to discover supposed foundations of such wall removed would be necessary to determine

* John G. Reyersen House, 367 Goffle Road, Hawthorne. (NJ-165)

(e) The account of Major (later Lieut. Col.) Henry Lee, better known as "Light Horse Harry" Lee, publ. 1933 in the Dict. of Amer. Biogr., vol. XI, does not mention this incident.

the matter, as this wing is not excavated. That last fact also indicates the wing having been built contemporary with the main house, either separately or in abutment as it stands, for basement storage space for vegetables, milk, etc., was necessary in any Dutch house.

In any event, it is apparent that the house was built in or before 1766, in which year Dirck Reyerson devised it to his wife during her widowhood, and thereafter to his eldest son John Dircksen (who came of age in 1782) as abovesaid, and the latter is of record elsewhere as owning it in 1788 and until his death in 1835. Accordingly, it is clear that the house was indeed standing in 1780 when, as tradition or other testimony has it, Major Henry Lee occupied it as headquarters.

The house may have suffered damage which required the restoration of the hand-hewn floor beams of the first floor by the existing sawed ones which indicate their date of about 1830. Likewise of that period is the transformation of the main entrance door, the addition of a large front porch (the western part of which has since been changed to an enclosed sun room) and the interior woodwork of mantels. The great open garret has since been partitioned into bedrooms lighted by dormer windows inserted in the original roof at a comparatively modern time. The drawings made in this survey show a restoration of the original elevations of the house as well as of the present altered condition.

Bibliography:

A search of title by Joseph Benenati,
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